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## From Donovan's Diary, Gripping Tale of a Spy

When the phone rang in attorney James B. Donovan's summer cottage, it ended a vacation that hadn't begun and started a five-year "assignment" that was to cost him clients, alienate friends, distress his family, and finally take him behind the Berlin Wall to dicker secretly with Soviet agents.

The assignment: The defense of the master Soviet spy Col. Rudolf I. Abel, which Mr. Donovan accepted and has now turned into a fascinating journal, *Strangers on a Bridge* (Atheneum; 432 pages; \$6.95). The story of the bizarre Abel affair is told chronologically from Mr. Donovan's day-by-day diary. And despite the widespread coverage of the Abel trial, the U.S. Supreme Court decision on his appeal, and the Abel-Francis Gary Powers swap in 1962, this first complete account holds the reader from beginning to end.

### The Government's Trump Card

Arrested in a Manhattan hotel room in June 1957, Abel, a colonel in the KGB (Soviet secret service), was an almost impossible defendant to defend. In the hotel room and Abel's artist studio in Brooklyn, the FBI found short-wave radios, coded messages, microfilm equipment, and marked-up maps of U.S. defense areas. On viewing the evidence against his client, Mr. Donovan wrote in his journal: "It [the evidence] spread out before us in a long, well-lighted room like some giant smorgasbord, filling 25 tables."

This evidence, of course, provided the Government with its strongest suit against Abel, but its trump card was a full confession by Reino Hayhenen, an accomplice of the colonel. Against such formidable odds and the risk of the death penalty for peacetime espionage, many attorneys would prefer their clients to plead guilty, in hopes of winning a more lenient sentence.

### Working on Jail Blueprints

Reviewing the Abel case, however, attorney Donovan concluded that the seizure of evidence had violated Constitutional guarantees. His appeal based on this point, eventually reached the Supreme Court, where it was turned down—but only by a

five-to-four decision.

Many attacked Mr. Donovan for this appeal on the grounds that the defense was standing on a "technicality" to free an obvious spy. But these attacks were nothing new to the Donovans. From the moment Mr. Donovan took the case, he and his family suffered threats, crank calls, and snide innuendos about "leftist leanings." Even long-standing clients shied away from "embarrassing" business ties.

Always buttressing Mr. Donovan against such threats and rebuffs was his belief that, by giving Abel a strong defense, he was serving the best interest of the United States and the law. Mr. Donovan turned over his \$10,000 fee to charity.

Strangely enough, when the pressures and difficulties of the case were heaviest, it was often the defendant who eased the tensions. Once, Mr. Donovan was surprised to find Colonel Abel calmly working on a complete set of the blueprints of the New York jail in which he was being held. He was redrafting some plans he had suggested to the warden for better utilization of space.

The author describes Colonel Abel as a "genius," and the facts would seem to bear him out. The colonel knew six languages; was an electronics engineer; was well versed in nuclear physics, chemistry, higher mathematics, and cryptography; and was also considered an accomplished amateur painter and musician. Paradoxically, his eventual undoing was caused by two rather stupid mistakes: Blind acceptance of an obviously incompetent confederate who later betrayed him, and failure to follow a basic rule of spies—hide incriminating equipment.

When Mr. Donovan becomes involved in a possible swap of Abel for Mr. Powers, the American pilot captured by Russia for spying in a U-2 aircraft, the pace of the book actually picks up. The final negotiations, which take place in a run-down section of East Berlin, have the aura of a James Bond thriller.

Author Donovan has a fine sense of essentials and a good reporting style. *Strangers on a Bridge* fills in the gaps and provides an excellent wrap-up of an important story of the 1960s.

—JAMES H. MOONEY, JR.